

Washington, D.C. - The TRACS Act --- a bill clarifying federal law to ensure regulators weigh the dangers to community safety and quality of life when considering rail mergers – won support of a majority of the U.S. House of Representatives today, but failed on a super-majority vote after a strong push by the railroad industry against the bill.

“I’m grateful that a majority of my colleagues saw the clear need for this legislation, which restores critical balance to our regulatory structure,” said Congresswoman Melissa Bean (IL-08) one of the bill’s original co-sponsors and authors. “Unfortunately, in the midst of dealing with this unprecedented financial crisis, it was necessary to move this bill under fast-track rules that required a super-majority vote. And I’m disappointed that, despite the strong bipartisan support of this bill, some of our colleagues didn’t agree that the impact on communities and the rights of ordinary taxpayers must be taken into account when these railroad deals are considered by the Surface Transportation Board.”

The bill failed on a 243-175 vote; a two-thirds vote was required under the rules. The railroad industry, which has profited by operating under the 19th-century rules of the STB and its predecessor, lobbied hard against the bill.

The Taking Responsible Action for Community Safety (TRACS) Act, H.R. 6707, would clarify the Surface Transportation Board’s authority over any transaction involving at least one major (Class 1) railroad and would require the STB to balance “the safety and environmental effects of the proposed transaction, including the effects on local communities with the potential benefits to commerce.” If the adverse effects on communities are significant or outweigh the potential commercial benefits, the STB would be required to disapprove or mitigate the transaction.

Bean helped introduce the bill with House Transportation Committee Chairman James Oberstar (MN-08) as part of her fight against Canadian National Railway's proposed purchase of the EJ&E rail line. Bean first alerted Oberstar to the devastating impact of the proposed CN transaction when she brought him on a tour of the region earlier this year.

Along with threats to suburban rail, CN's proposed purchase would result in up to a 900 percent increase in rail traffic along the EJ&E line, cutting through many suburban communities. The increase will have a significant negative impact on traffic congestion along major roads, public safety, quality of life, environmental quality, and local economies.

Bean said she will continue to oppose the transaction, both in proceedings before the STB and on the floor of the U.S. Congress.

"I will continue my work on behalf of our communities to oppose this transaction."